

ican cinema. Oscar Micheaux, the most famous filmmaker of the race film era, is her primary subject here. The isolated figure of previous studies develops as part of the social and institutional networks that made him an influential and productive artist. In her detailed and sensitive reading of Micheaux's 1920 film, *Within Our Gates*, she argues that Micheaux took the narrative invention of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and applied it to African American rhet-

oric of racial uplift. In so doing, he indicated "the unreliability of cinematic representation of Blackness in general" (p. 237). This insight is by itself worth the price of admission.

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Black is a Country
Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy
 By Nikhil Pal Singh

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005. Pp. 285. Notes, index. \$16.95.)

In this critical volume, Nikhil Pal Singh demonstrates why racism in America is still an issue. He argues that existing struggles have resulted from American imperialism, internationalism, and neocolonialism, movements that have undermined democratic engagement in and outside of the United States. Singh's subtitle, "Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy," suggests that black African descendants continue to be traumatized by a type of neo-liberalism that critiques white supremacy and racial capitalism, but does not include blacks as complete partakers of the democratic ideal. Within this context, Singh writes convincingly that global democracy remains an unfinished project because its ideals are linked to super-

ficial notions of universalism, paternalism, and American exceptionalism, all of which prevent blacks from engaging in processes and positions that would help to dismantle global racism and foster transnationalist politics that might make democracy a universal reality. Connected to this global perspective is a black reality that recognizes freedom as an ideological construction, dictated by race and the ideals of white supremacy, that sees democracy as a praxis that involves protest and blacks' right to act as their own agents of change.

Through an examination of various social and political movements in twentieth-century American communities, the five chapters comprising *Black is a Country* connect readers to evolving scholarship that has

begun to deconstruct the United States' mythologized position as the great preserver and practitioner of democracy in the world. Using frameworks that examine such forms of activism as self-autonomy, dissent, a black critique of the dialectic of race and nation, the establishment by blacks of a counter-public space that deconstructs liberalism, and the practice of a black self-determinism that challenges the erasure of racism from the American fabric, Singh shows that this country has not been a nation into which black people could successfully integrate, "but an empire they needed to oppose—not a beloved community of shared traditions and aspirations, but a coercive state to be overthrown" (p. 197). Indeed, for the majority of people of African descent, black is a country and "blackness" has been a terrain, a space that seemingly necessitates automatic occupation and domination, forcing black people to endure an experience that has led many, like Langston Hughes, to continue to proclaim that, "America never was America to me."

This volume possesses much strength. But it places the struggle for global democracy too much between the black and white binary. This is an

approach that W. E. B. DuBois and Martin Luther King, Jr., would have critiqued as unacceptable, since other oppressed voices are needed to move the U.S. mainstream beyond national allegiances to a world perspective. In addition, the author should have defined more clearly such phrases as "nation-state" and such concepts as "rethinking" race and nation; "reconstructing" democracy; "internationalizing" freedom; "Americanizing" the Negro; and "decolonizing" America, so that the very people about whom he is writing can assess these ideas and understand them in such a way that they feel compelled to engage in the universal struggle to end oppression.

Black is a Country will have strong critics, many of whom will cry that the author has misread race relations and has reset in motion the old struggles igniting disunity. Yet this volume should be read by every literate citizen of the world and discussed among all those who believe in freedom.

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